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# Alberta. Dept. of Education

## SCHOOL DIVISIONS IN ALBERTA

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During the fall of 1936, in accordance with Part XVII of The School Act, eleven school divisions were organized in Alberta, comprising 744 rural school districts. All began operation early in 1937 and, as a result, one year's experience with the new organization is now available.

From reports submitted by the Divisional Boards the following statement has been compiled. The original eleven divisions were: No. 1—Berry Creek; No. 2—St. Mary's River; No. 3—Foremost; No. 4—Cypress; No. 5—Tilley East; No. 6—Taber; No. 7—Lehrbridge; No. 8—Acadia; No. 9—Sullivan Lake; No. 10—Peace River and No. 11—Lac Ste. Anne. Each Division consists of five subdivisions each of which elects a member of the trustee board. Each Division has a director of education known as the Superintendent, and a secretary-treasurer who has charge of the office, keeps the records and attends to all the business details arising from the activities of the Board.

The Boards meet monthly, receive reports from their officers and from sub-committees, and discharge the functions common to similar bodies in towns and cities. The following statement, organized under headings which represent their most important activities, will set out the composite experience of these bodies:

### FINANCE:

The Act provides that the financing of the schools shall be carried on through the existing municipal organization. The first task of the Board on taking office is a survey of the needs of the Division and the compilation of a budget. When this has been determined requisitions are prepared for each of the municipal authorities operating within the Division and the Department of Municipal Affairs for Improvement Districts. While it was not the purpose of the new organization to show that educational service could be carried on at a lower cost, it happens that in every Division the actual expenditures have been less than during the last year of operation under the district organization. A comparison of actual figures for the Divisions will indicate the relative costs for the years 1936 and 1937:

Cost of Operation	1936	1937
Division No. 1	\$ 27,023.27	\$20,881.53
Division No. 2	19,289.95	74,177.00
Division No. 3	101,468.39	87,540.81
Division No. 4	56,932.36	53,373.69
Division No. 5	29,038.41	22,287.11
Division No. 6	60,570.30	53,880.80
Division No. 7	101,810.93	94,626.76
Division No. 8	84,516.40	84,588.63
Division No. 9	58,327.08	46,234.84
Division No. 10	65,817.38	48,148.08
Division No. 11	58,513.54	84,997.54

### TEACHERS' SALARIES:

By far the largest item of expense in these operating costs is the charge for teachers' salaries. The Act requires that each Board establish a salary schedule in order that teachers may know definitely what to expect in the way of recognition for satisfactory services, additional training, higher qualifications and the like. Because the Divisions represent areas varying greatly in ability to pay, the schedules adopted vary widely. For example, in one Division no teacher is paid at a rate less than the statutory minimum (\$440.00). In another, the average salary in 1936 was \$799.19, while in 1937 after the adoption of a schedule it was \$815.00. In one of the Divisions a gross amount of \$4,498.19 was added to the salary bill as a result of adopting a schedule. In another Division the average salary increase was \$62.31; and in another the average paid was increased from \$710.00 to \$771.00. In the majority of the Divisions there were large sums owing to teachers in the way of arrears of salary. These amounts have all been assumed by the Divisional Boards. In some cases the arrears have been wiped out entirely. In others, agreements have been reached with the teachers whereby the indebtedness will be reduced gradually, the entire amount being paid off in three, four and five years.

When the salary schedules were being drafted, and the teachers assigned to their proper places on the schedule, it was a common thing to find an experienced teacher with summer school credits, advanced academic standing and gradings of "Very Good" and "Excellent" being paid a salary from one hundred to one hundred and fifty dollars below the minimum, while in the next district a teacher without experience and the

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minimum of training would be receiving the highest salary in the entire Division. It is estimated that the elimination of this injustice by means of the salary schedule has improved the morale and teaching efficiency from 25 to 35 per cent.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS:

The Superintendents continue to be appointed and paid by the Province. There is no charge to the Division either for salary or travelling expenses of this official. The secretary-treasurer is appointed and paid by the Divisional Board. During the year under review, salaries of these officials have varied from \$350.00 to \$1,250.00. In the larger Divisions the work has proven heavy and the entire time of the secretary has been required to cope with it. Divisional trustees are allowed a per diem allowance of \$5.00, and travelling expenses to the extent of eight cents per mile when in attendance at Board meetings. In small, compact Divisions, expenditures on this account are very light, while in large sparsely settled Divisions the costs are much higher. Payments to Board members, per Division, on account of expenses incurred in attending regular meetings, carrying out building surveys and straightening out difficulties, vary from \$350.00 to \$600.00. Administrative costs including furnishing the Board's offices, secretary's salary, expenses of Board members and annual audit, have been from 10 to 35 per cent. less than the amounts expended for secretarial service and audits under the district system.

#### PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS:

In every instance the Divisions closed the year with all salaries paid. Generally speaking all debenture payments had been met. In instances where this was not true, negotiations are under way either for refunding or some species of consolidation. As in the case of arrears of salary, debenture payments in default cannot be taken care of out of the current revenue of any one year. Accounts contracted this year have all been met promptly, though in some Divisions it will probably take from three to five years to get all overdue indebtedness paid up. In other words the business of the Division has been faced squarely by business men and women and the necessary steps taken to have obligations met in a business-like way. The chairman of one Division stated that while he had been opposed to the Divisional plan of organization while it was in process of formation, he had been compelled to completely alter his point of view during the year. He had accepted a position on the Divisional Board because he was determined that the ratepayers' money should not be wasted. At the end of the year he stated publicly that he was compelled to admit that his opposition had not been well founded for three reasons: Firstly; in a number of instances he had been shocked by the absence of anything like business methods revealed by the books turned over by the districts; Secondly; because of the greatly increased value which the Divisional Board had been able to secure for every dollar expended; Thirdly; because of the increased power which the combined strength of all the districts gave the Divisional Board in planning a long term programme of building and re-conditioning, of refunding debenture indebtedness, of handling effectively the programmes of high school education, and the introduction of specialized courses.

#### SUPPLIES:

Requisition forms were forwarded from the Divisional office to each teacher, with instructions that information be furnished by a given date as to the needs of the school in the matter of supplies, teaching aids, etc., for the balance of the year. When these were returned all items were consolidated into one list and tenders invited from the various supply houses. These tenders indicated that savings of from 25 to 50 per cent. could be made by bulk purchase. Orders were accordingly placed and supplies delivered according to directions. In most Divisions the goods were all delivered at headquarters and distributed from there. In addition to the saving, another great advantage accrued. The supplies were all secured promptly and were in the school and available when needed. Lack of the necessary text-books and the most essential supplies have before this, reduced the efficiency of many a school more than 50 per cent. to say nothing of driving conscientious teachers to despair. Similarly, great savings have been made through the bulk purchase of fuel. In every Division, furniture no longer required in a particular school was found available to transfer to points where it was needed. In this way almost no outlay for heavier equipment was required. In the future by means of inventories, kept up to date, Divisional Boards will be able to use all their equipment to maximum capacity.

#### **INCREASED SUPERVISION:**

The increased supervision which is expected to be a feature of the Divisional administration has in some instances not materialised to any great extent during this initial year of operation. Several factors have made this desirable supervision impossible of realisation this year. Four Superintendents have been responsible for two Divisions each. Five had heavy responsibilities for inspectional care of large areas over and above the Division. In some cases much time was taken in making surveys on which to base building and repair programmes. Then, there was a great deal of detail work in getting the system organized. This preliminary work has now in large measure been completed and an intensive programme of supervision is in prospect for next year. In every case the Superintendent has given special attention to inexperienced teachers and any having special difficulties, which, after all, is one of the characteristics of efficient supervision.

#### **BUILDINGS AND REPAIRS:**

In several Divisions, building programmes had to be carried on due to loss of former buildings by fire, as at Oudis, opening of new enterprises, as at Picture House, or shift in population which made extension of facilities necessary. Difficulties in financing these activities were experienced at some points but ultimately solutions were found. In others practically no re-conditioning had been done since the onset of the depression. Thus repairs were in arrears as much as five or six years. In such Divisions surveys were carried out to see where these repairs were most needed. With this information before them, the Boards adopted comprehensive policies covering a period of years which would distribute the cost, take care of the most pressing cases, and meet the situations confronting them in a business-like manner. While no effort has been made to estimate the value of this repair work, in one Division alone re-conditioning to the value of \$9,000.00 was completed.

#### **TEACHER PLACEMENT:**

At the close of the school year (June 1937) several teachers asked for transfers to other schools; similarly several district boards asked that they might have a change of teacher. In practically every instance such transfers and replacements were made entirely without friction and to the satisfaction of all concerned. In a few instances it was found necessary to refuse re-appointment to teachers. Although there were approximately sixty appeals to the Board of Reference on the part of teachers in July 1937, not one of these appeals came from teachers serving in a Division. With an assured position on a salary schedule and expectation of prompt payment of salary, teachers are quite willing to accept transfers to other schools where their particular type of service will be found most useful. It is now possible to envision an ever-increasing group of rural school specialists, i.e., teachers who remain in rural schools from choice and who have, through experience, specialized training, facility with single-room type of organization, and community interest made themselves almost priceless as rural citizens. It will be the ambition of the Divisional administration to make the conditions of service so attractive to such teachers that there will be no temptation to them to seek city appointments.

#### **ADJUSTMENTS IN OPERATION:**

In several of the sections of the Province served by the Divisions there have been such shifts in population as to make the operation of considerable numbers of schools uneconomical. Under the Act, provision exists for the joint operation of two schools, with transportation allowances in the case of children too far away from the school actually being operated. In the two northern Divisions no schools have been closed, but additional rooms have been opened. In the south, however, not less than twenty-five schools were closed and the children still remaining in the districts provided for in neighbouring schools. This has resulted not only in a considerable saving in money but in more efficient schooling for the children as well. In other cases school buildings have been moved to locations calculated to serve the children of the community more conveniently. That 35 schools were closed does not mean that there was a net loss of that many rooms. New rooms were opened in areas where population is on the increase and high school rooms opened to meet the needs of those desiring advanced training.

## ADDITIONAL SERVICES

### HEALTH SUPERVISION:

In five of the Divisions a beginning has been made towards providing a complete programme of health supervision. The Boards are working in close co-operation with the Department of Health, and foundations are being laid for a marked expansion of this service next year.

### LIBRARY SERVICE:

In nine of the Divisions progress has been made in providing more adequate library service for the children. In two of these, complete schemes have been organised whereby regular exchanges of books take place, each school having access to from 120 to 300 new books during the year. All books in existing libraries have been assembled, re-conditioned and re-distributed. The Divisional Boards have supplemented these with grants of new books to the extent of several hundred dollars. This problem has been attacked in a generous spirit with courage and wisdom and splendid progress made. The introduction of the new programme made the re-organization of the whole library plan a necessity.

### MUSIC:

In two of the Divisions full-time Music Supervisors have been employed. In others, arrangements have been made for regular teachers, well qualified in music, to assist other teachers through exchange of subjects and special meetings. Support is being given to local festivals and children encouraged to participate. Some boards are making ability in music a requirement of those securing appointment. In view of the expense involved in travelling, this would seem a sound plan even although it means considerable delay in getting complete provision for the teaching of this subject.

### INSURANCE:

The matter of adequate insurance coverage has received attention from all Boards. Arrangements have been considered for complete protection of all buildings whether occupied or not. Surveys are under way with a view to adjusting valuations. It is expected that arrangements will be made during the next two or three years for the issuance of blanket policies which will cover the entire risk in each Division.

### CONVEYANCE:

The whole question of transportation is under review. No provision is made in that section of the Act dealing with Divisions for conveyance charges. In cases where it is considered uneconomical to continue the operation of a school it is obviously of great advantage to be able to make it possible for the remaining children to attend a school farther away. Other provisions of the Act are invoked and the situation met in that way. The needs of the Divisions in this regard are being studied in order that a uniform procedure may be devised.

### CARETAKING:

Uniform scales of payment have been adopted throughout the Divisions. Those charged with the responsibility for this service receive instructions as to the work they are to do, receive their pay promptly and take pride in having the school in good shape, since the employer, in the person of the Divisional Board trustee or the superintendent may drop in any day.

### SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Schools authorized to give advanced work such as that of Grade IX, are provided with the equipment necessary for the science courses and the options which have been approved. As in the case of furniture, so in the case of this equipment, it has been found possible to transfer from schools where it is no longer in use to those where it is needed.

### SPORTS:

Already arrangements have been made for field days to serve groups of schools, and signs of inter-sub-divisional rivalries are in evidence. Nothing is easier to generate than school pride. If this can be expanded to include pride in the achievements of the entire division, much will have been done towards developing community solidarity.

### INCREASE IN LENGTH OF SCHOOL YEAR:

In several of the Divisions it had been the custom in a considerable number of schools to discontinue operation during January and a part of February in each year. The Divisional Boards undertook to improve the operation record of these schools. So successful have they been that it is estimated that the record of all schools in the Divisions having these schools will be increased from five to eight days.

## UNIFORM TAX RATE:

Progress has been made towards equalizing the tax rate throughout the Division. While the financing remains in the hands of the municipal authorities the final decision as to rate must remain with the Council or the Department of Municipal Affairs. Experience of the year under review shows that these authorities have shown a very commendable spirit of co-operation.

## ELIMINATION OF FEES WITHIN THE DIVISION:

Under the new organization any pupil may attend any school within the Division without being subject to any question as to his right to attend there whatsoever. Pupils may attend the school most convenient without the payment of fees.

## HIGH SCHOOL FACILITIES:

It is in this particular field that the Divisions have made their most significant achievement. One Board is able to say that no pupil in the entire Division who wished to proceed from the Intermediate School to High School, last September, was prevented from doing so. Next mid-summer, this Board plans to open an additional high school room in the extreme north of the Division to serve more conveniently the children resident there. In another, three high school rooms were opened in widely separated sections of the Division to meet the needs of pupils in those areas. In three Divisions where it was found impossible to arrange high school facilities for certain pupils, due to the sparseness of population, the Board paid for correspondence courses at the rate of \$4.00 per unit for all children so circumstanced. In one Division the enrolment of high school pupils for the year 1937 increased from 36 to 68, an increase of 143%. This was made possible largely through the Divisions paying tuition fees to the amount of \$2,480.00. Every superintendent reports some action looking towards the provision of increased opportunity for high school study and an increased number taking advantage of it. Nor are the courses all of the academic type. A beginning has been made in several Divisions in providing such practical courses as general shop, household sciences and typewriting.

## CO-OPERATION OF DISTRICT BOARDS:

All reports state that Divisional officers have made a point of consulting the local boards in all matters which are of immediate concern to them. The response has been for the most part a generous and whole-hearted co-operation. In a few instances either the entire board or individuals had taken strong ground in opposition to the plan. The attitude of such people is one of watchful waiting. There is reason to believe that they are generous and patriotic enough to give their support as soon as the plan has demonstrated that it will do what has been claimed for it. There are, too, notable instances similar to that of the chairman quoted above, where those who opposed strenuously the introduction of the large unit have altered their viewpoint and have been generous enough to say so publicly. The following letters are typical of expressions being received at the Department:

"The Minister of Education,  
Edmonton, Alberta,  
Dear Sir:—

"Vauxhall, Alberta,  
March 25th, 1937.

At the annual meeting of the Vauxhall School District, the following Resolution was unanimously carried:

"RESOLVED that the Trustees of the Vauxhall School District desire to go on record as being heartily in favor of the present larger unit system of School Districts, as in effect in this District, and that copy of same be forwarded to the Department of Education."

In accordance with the desire of those present at the Meeting, I am therefore sending a copy of the Resolution on to you so that you might know the feelings of the Trustees of this District towards the workings of the Larger Unit System.

Yours truly,

"The Vauxhall School Board,

per— A. W. Ross, Secretary."

"The Deputy Minister,  
Department of Education,  
Edmonton, Alberta,  
Dear Sir:—

"Pin's Lake S.D. No. 289,  
Medicine Hat, Alberta,  
December 17, 1937.

The Pin's Lake School District No. 289 has been included in the Cypress School Division since January 1st, 1937. The board of trustees of this district believe that this is a proper and efficient means of providing for the education of the district.

We have heard of other school districts in the Cypress Division No. 4 benefiting to a very considerable extent through the services rendered by the Divisional Board, for example, Scholter School District, where a second room was opened and Chapleo Lake School District in which the School was placed at a more convenient place for the children; also Camrose Lake School District which was assisted with its finances. The requirements of our district have not been as great as these districts but

mentioned, but our board wishes to express its satisfaction with the way in which the Cypress Division has functioned so far, and we consider that the prospect of the regular operation of our school and the meeting of its needs for equipment and supplies are distinctly better now that the Division has been organized. This statement is given voluntarily and I might mention that our district was not in any financial difficulty prior to the organization of the Division."

Yours truly,

"Thos. S. Burridge,

Sec.-Treas. Peace Lake S.D., No. 2029."

"Mr. Jonsson,  
Bullman Lake S.D.,  
Hanna, Alberta.

"Watts, Alberta,  
December 21, 1921.

Dear Mr. Jonsson:—

From the standpoint of a parent, I wish to thank you for, so promptly after my request, having arranged for a supply of drinking water at our school.

The change to the larger unit has given us many improvements — an interested, unpetrified, and capable Board in harmony with yourself, with a full-time secretary to administer the Act; better janitor arrangement; regularly paid teachers; better fuel and equipment supplies; are some of the better conditions which are to the decided advantage of the pupils both in present comfort and, I am sure, in final achievement.

We know of better feeding of children, of even the moving of buildings, of re-distribution of libraries, but the greatest benefit of all is the establishing of Rural High Schools. We are indeed grateful that our older pupils may now, in spite of the poverty of these dry years, obtain the higher education which we had been forced to deny them.

Yours very truly,

"Laura F. Philbin."

#### PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR:

Each report makes mention of plans which the Board has under consideration for the near future, though all express the determination to keep expenditures to approximately the former level for the present, even though some of the projected improvements may have to wait for a time. The following list has been compiled from all the reports in order that the Boards may have in mind what others are doing:

- (1) More Supervision.
- (2) A considerable number of towns and villages will join the Divisions as soon as a satisfactory procedure has been devised.
- (3) The building and repair programme will be prosecuted as vigorously as finances will permit.
- (4) An attempt will be made to establish an adequate programme of health supervision in all the Divisions.
- (5) The provision of high school service including the more general introduction of practical courses, will be pushed vigorously.
- (6) In three Divisions it is proposed to establish a reference library for teachers.
- (7) Provision is being made for more dramatic and musical festivals.
- (8) The more extended use of correspondence courses for isolated high school pupils for whom no provision can be made for actual school attendance.
- (9) Three Divisions have under consideration arrangements for dormitory accommodation for high school pupils living away from home.
- (10) Divisional Boards will co-operate with towns in the Division in offering Grade XII classes in areas where such service is not now available.
- (11) Salary schedules now too low will be increased.
- (12) Re-distribution of Readers. It has been observed that Readers supplied for Grades IV, V, and VI last much longer than the first three books. A survey reveals that in some Divisions no new issue of these Readers will be required at all, next year.

#### ADDITIONAL UNITS — 1921

During 1921 an educational campaign looking towards the establishment of additional Divisions was carried on generally throughout the Province. As a consequence, eleven more were organized before the end of the year, as follows:

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| No. 13 Pembina School Division.        | No. 17 Holden School Division.     |
| No. 14 Clever Bar School Division.     | No. 18 Lamont School Division.     |
| No. 15 Grande Prairie School Division. | No. 19 Vegreville School Division. |
| No. 16 Rocky Mountain School Division. | No. 20 Camrose School Division.    |
| No. 18 Neutral Hills School Division.  | No. 21 Two Hills School Division.  |
| No. 22 Killam School Division.         |                                    |

Seven hundred and forty-seven school districts are included in these, bringing the total now in the new plan of organization up to fourteen hundred and ninety-one. The entire Province has been tentatively re-distributed so that when the work of re-organization has been completed there will be approximately fifty Divisions. In the meantime, the policy of setting up the large units will be continued and new ones added as opportunity offers.

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